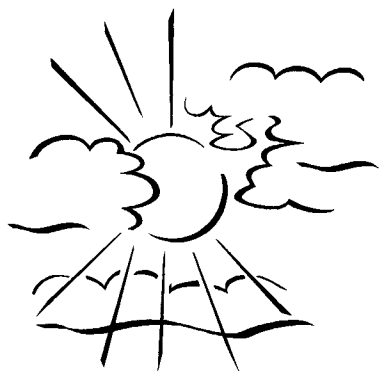


***Department
of
Human
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, September 12, 2005

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REPORT NO. 175 VOLUME 44

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2005

BUDGET AGREEMENT BOOSTS COLLEGES, SEEKS ALTERNATIVE ON M.Y.C.F.

An agreement reached finally by the administration of Governor Jennifer Granholm and legislative leaders will mean a budget that is some \$70 million more than Ms. Granholm's general fund proposal with no changes in taxes or major state fees, but does contemplate that the state will securitize approximately \$1 billion in tobacco settlement fees.

The budget will also mean a boost for the state's universities as well as a victory for two Republican legislative higher education proposals: floor funding, wanted by the Senate GOP, and institution of a funding formula that House GOP members wanted.

The budget will also include funding for the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Baldwin as well as a line-item calling for expenditure of \$18 million. Republican leaders are hoping Ms. Granholm will line-item veto the \$18 million line – equivalent to expenditures on the Baldwin prison – instead of the prison in Lake County.

While the budget agreement sets overall parameters for the departments, officials said a number of decisions will still be made by the conference committees, including decisions on co-pays that Medicaid recipients will have to pay.

The budget will include controversies, including cutting the additional \$15 million that had been allocated to Detroit Public Schools to \$7 million with the other money allocated to higher education.

House proposals to cut cash grants to welfare recipients and put limits on the time they can receive assistance were eliminated. But new pilot projects to find ways to move recipients into self-sufficiency will be developed and a joint House/Senate task force is developing ideas on how to cut Medicaid funding.

In a joint statement with legislative leaders, Ms. Granholm said, "Despite our tremendous challenges, this budget ensures that funding for higher education, health care and services for our most vulnerable citizens are protected."

The agreement was not embraced with great enthusiasm. Possibly the most excitement shown was from Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming), who said the "overriding priority" of Senate Republicans was met and that was that no taxes and fees be raised.

"Government has to live within its means and that is reflected in this agreement," Mr. Sikkema said.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) hailed the budget because it relies on no new taxes or fees.

"I believe that this sends a signal to Michigan businesses and residents that we will not be coming back and asking them for new taxes and fees," he told Gongwer News Service. "That's what we

said we were going to do in the House January 12 when I was sworn in and a lot of people didn't think we would get that accomplished."

But Senate Minority Leader Bob Emerson (D-Flint) said, "It's hard to be too excited about the tough calls that are in this budget, but that's what we're elected to do and we're doing the best with the hand we've been dealt."

House Minority Leader Dianne Byrum (D-Onondaga) praised Ms. Granholm for "her leadership in bring people together from both sides of aisle to forge a budget that is fiscally responsible and allows us to focus on the task of creating good-paying jobs and moving Michigan's economy forward."

Asked how significant a roll the "Price of Government" process played in developing the budget, Mr. Sikkema said it was very significant in at least one major component. "Live within our means," he said. "From that alone it had a huge impact."

Because the House passed a single omnibus budget bill and the Senate passed a separate bill for each budget, the Legislature will use both methods to send a budget to Ms. Granholm. The budgets that would have originated in the House will be rolled into one omnibus budget, while the budgets that would have originated in the Senate will be passed as separate budget bills.

THE BUDGET DETAILS: A MIXTURE OF CUTS AND HIKES

The budget agreement reached Friday by Governor Jennifer Granholm and the legislative leadership would total more \$8.977 billion in general funds, more than \$70 million more than what Ms. Granholm proposed last winter and hundreds of millions more than what both houses of the Legislature passed.

The agreement is in fact \$455 million more than what the House passed in June and \$380 million more than what the Senate passed, though those totals did not include provisions for capital outlay projects.

But the agreement relies on no tax increases or fee increases, according to Republican leaders, which they termed a major victory.

GENERAL FUND BUDGET

(Amounts in millions of dollars)

Department	2004-05	2005-06			
		Gov. Rec.	Senate Passed	House Passed	Target Agreement
Agriculture	28.4	28.6	28.7	28.6	28.4
Attorney General	31.1	32.7	31.9	31.0	31.5
Capital Outlay	243.2	276.0	0	0	256.0
Civil Rights	11.6	12.3	11.8	11.4	12.1
Civil Service	7.4	7.4	7.2	7.3	7.1
Community Colleges	292.1	281.3	260.5	281.3	281.3
Community Health	2,534.1	2,920.6	2,866.3	2,842.6	2,951.9
Corrections	1,688.9	1,805.3	1,776.1	1,748.5	1,781.2
Education	26.1	28.9	15.8	16.5	16.4
Environmental Quality	26.1	30.5	30.8	29.4	31.8
Executive	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.4
Higher Education	1,622.1	1,492.8	1,556.9	1,545.4	1,576.9
History, Arts Libraries	45.2	43.2	41.5	42.3	41.8
Human Services	1,076.4	1,106.6	1,076.3	1,028.4	1,081.3
Judiciary	157.5	160.0	155.8	157.0	157.6
Labor/Economic Growth	93.7	73.8	87.8	71.0	70.4
Legislature	122.2	122.2	120.0	121.4	124.7
Management & Budget	35.7	36.5	35.2	34.3	35.2

Military/Veterans Affairs	36.7	38.3	38.0	38.3	37.8
Natural Resources	28.5	26.5	25.9	25.6	25.6
School Aid	165.2	20.2	70.4	96.4	62.7
State	13.3	14.3	13.9	13.2	13.5
State Police	240.9	239.0	234.1	243.8	235.4
Treasury (Debt Service)	42.4	52.9	52.9	52.9	52.9
Treasury (Operations)	48.7	52.6	55.8	49.4	57.7
Treasury (Revenue Sharing)	.4	.2	.3	1.0	.7
TOTALS	8,623.1	8,907.2	8,599.1	8,522.2	8,977.3

NOTE: The Department of Information Technology and Department of Transportation receive no general fund dollars and thus are not included in the table above. Also, the general fund allocation for school aid is a small part of a total budget that under the agreement will get \$12.76 billion, up from \$12.43 billion in the current year and slightly less than the \$12.81 billion recommended by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

There are revenue increases projected, however. The budget anticipates the state hiring additional auditors to target tax scofflaws, a plan that officials hope will net some \$30 million.

In addition, the state will securitize \$1 billion of tobacco settlement funds for economic development purposes, and use between \$25 million and \$30 million of interest income to help prop up the budget.

Asked if this wasn't a one-time gimmick, Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) said there were a number of one-time maneuvers in the budget. "It's a one-year budget," he said, adding he doesn't get as worked up by those concerns as others do.

Mr. DeRoche said the acceptance of some one-time revenue sources was the toughest item for him to accept – "something I normally wouldn't have an appetite for."

But he noted that one of the one-time revenue sources – the interest earned on securitized tobacco settlement revenues – would come from legislation that also is tied to the House GOP's tax plan.

One potential pitfall for House Republicans is that the budget does not build in a cut in business taxes, something they have urged.

With the exception of education, virtually all departments will see cuts, Mr. Sikkema told reporters.

There are some increases. The Department of Environmental Quality will see a boost of \$1.3 million from the original proposal, to \$31.8 million. And the Executive Office and the Legislature will also see increases, but a budget spokesperson said those cover increases in health insurance and retirement costs.

HIGHER EDUCATION: The biggest increase in terms of general fund spending will go to higher education, which will be allocated \$1.576 billion. Ms. Granholm had proposed just under \$1.5 billion, but that also included spending on maintenance in another line.

That budget is enhanced by \$7 million to help set floor funding of \$3,650 per student – even at that the funding for Grand Valley State University will not be raised to that level – and by \$7 million for formula funding wanted by the House.

Grand Valley State, Oakland and Saginaw Valley State universities were the big winners from the public university budget as all would receive increases of more than 7 percent, according to the leader of a university association.

Mike Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council State Universities of Michigan, said GVSU would receive a 7.5 percent increase, Oakland 7.2 percent and SVSU 7.1 percent.

Mr. Boulus said Central Michigan University and the University of Michigan-Dearborn would receive increases of about 2 percent. The other universities would receive smaller increases, in many cases of just a few tenths of a percentage point.

Mr. Boulus said he is pleased Wayne State and NMU were spared and described the budget as essentially flat compared to the current 2004-05 fiscal year.

"But given where we've been and the economic conditions we're working under, that's not all bad," he said.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) was particularly pleased that, beginning in July, funding for universities would be allocated in a method akin to the formula the House GOP wanted.

"From our perspective, it isn't the dollar amount, it's the formula," he said when asked if he was disappointed that NMU and WSU are escaping cuts. "The transition (to a formula) is being made and eventually those that would have otherwise received cuts hopefully by their own initiative in directing programs toward their outcomes will end up with more money."

The House GOP formula would give more money to universities offering certain types of degrees.

HUMAN SERVICES: Some of the more controversial proposals – such as reducing cash assistance and setting time limits for people to be on welfare – are out of the budget. A fact that Sharon Parks of the Michigan League for Human Services said was good news.

But she still worried about the level of co-pays that Medicaid recipients would have for some services. "It might not sound like a lot of money, but when you have a very low income it is a lot of money," Ms. Parks said.

Ms. Sikkema said he was pleased that the budget will call for Medicaid recipients to certify that they will adopt healthy practices as a method of lowering their co-pays.

One of the final disputes on the agreement had to do with funding for the Healthy Michigan fund, but Mr. Sikkema said he considered that effort largely ineffective pamphleteering.

The Department of Community Health will be allocated \$2.951 billion in general funds, compared to Ms. Granholm's original proposal of \$2.920 billion. The Department of Human Services will be allocated not quite \$1.1 billion, a cut of \$24 million.

Asked if he was disappointed on the welfare measure, Mr. DeRoche responded, "Hell, no." He said the House GOP "couldn't be happier" because the state in short order will begin working to move long-term recipients from welfare to work as the caucus wanted.

The agreement does contemplate development of a number of pilot projects to move more people into self-sufficiency and Mr. Sikkema said that was needed. The second stage of welfare reform had to begin, he said.

The Department of Human Services will have pilot studies in four to six areas to determine why some recipients remain on welfare for extended periods and then make recommendations on how to ease those recipients from the welfare rolls.

Human Services Director Marianne Udow said the budget was a win for state assistance recipients. "I'm enormously relieved that we're not going to be throwing people off the welfare rolls," she said.

Ms. Udow said many of those now in the welfare system are not able to find work within some of the deadlines that had been proposed during budget negotiations. "Those who are on welfare now are not the same people who were on welfare in 1995," she said, referring to the year that much of the reforms that created the current system became effective.

CORRECTIONS: The specter of which prison will be closed, if any, is one of the great lingering questions. Republicans say they are going to create an option for Ms. Granholm to not cut money for the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Baldwin, but there appears little doubt that the facility will lose its contract with the state.

As a privately-owned facility it has options of trying to get prisoners from other areas, but executives have argued that is not feasible.

The budget will total \$1.781 billion, down \$24 million from Ms. Granholm's original proposal.

Mr. Sikkema said the budget will be presented to Ms. Granholm with an option to eliminate \$18 million and require administrative cuts to make up the difference.

Closing the Baldwin facility would hurt the economy of Lake County, one of the poorest counties in the state, Mr. Sikkema said. He also said that because sentencing changes Ms. Granholm wanted to see made will not happen, changes the state had hoped would reduce the number of prisoners by 500, the state will need those prison beds.

Mr. DeRoche concurred with that point. "It's our position that Michigan is not in a position to lose the bed space from Baldwin or any other prison," he said. "But the governor of the state of Michigan is authorized to use the line-item veto, and we can't do anything to usurp that authority."

But officials in the Department of Corrections said Baldwin, which has been identified as one of the more inefficiently run prison operations in the state, will lose its contract.

Leo LaLonde, spokesperson for the Department of Corrections, said his department cannot take \$18 million in cuts. "Cutting \$18 million out of our budget would be devastating," he said. "If they want major reductions like that they're going to have to close facilities."

He said the department is already facing high overtime costs because of the positions it has not filled in attempts to hold costs down. He said further cuts would potentially require layoffs.

The move will protect the Newberry Correctional Facility, which Republicans had proposed closing instead of Baldwin, setting off a furious fight. Democratic lawmakers from the Upper Peninsula were delighted with the results.

D.L.E.G.: Another Republican target this year was the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, and particularly the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

The budget agreement calls for that department to get \$70.4 million, a \$3 million cut from Ms. Granholm's original proposal.

Mr. DeRoche also said he is pleased with an agreement to make the cut out of the department – money that like will come out of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, which House Republicans have heavily criticized as performing poorly.

Mr. Sikkema also said the department has failed to do its job to bring new developments to the state. He said he gets particularly vexed when he hears a promotional ad for the MEDC on the radio as he drives into Lansing. How is that supposed to help bring jobs to Michigan, he asked.

schoolkids

State spending plan also helps needy people, prisons

By DAWSON BELL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Schoolchildren, the needy and Michigan prison employees are among those who stand to benefit from an agreement reached Friday by lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm on a \$41-billion state budget that bridges differences between the sides without punishing taxpayers.

As usual, the deal reached by Democrat Granholm and Republican legislative leaders includes a little something for everyone.

Beneficiaries of Medicaid health care insurance and welfare, for instance, won't be hit with co-pays and premiums, time limits or healthy-living requirements in the near future, as the Legislature had proposed. But the deal requires the state to start moving

on changes that could lead to the same result down the road.

Workers at prisons in Manistique and Newberry in the Upper Peninsula, who had faced unemployment under budget proposals previously approved in the Legislature, apparently will be spared. But the future of their 225 colleagues at the Youth Correctional Facility near Baldwin is less rosy; Granholm says she'll veto the \$18

million legislators plan to include to keep that facility open.

Also, the amount of money in the budget for kindergarten through 12th grade public schools would be set at a minimum of \$6,875 per pupil, an increase of \$175.

The budget outline comes after several months of on-again, off-again negotiations and brinksmanship that raised the prospect — however remote — of a showdown Oct. 1, the end

See BUDGET, 8A

What the deal promises

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From Page 1A

of the state's fiscal year, and what could have been a symbolic shutdown of state government.

While many of the agreement's details still must be worked out, the deal appears to forestall that possibility.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, and House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, both described the agreement as a signal to Michiganders that state government could live within its means and balance a budget without raising taxes.

Granholtz released a statement in which she said: "Despite our tremendous challeng-

es, this budget ensures that funding for higher education, health care and services for our most vulnerable citizens are protected."

The budget for fiscal 2006 marks the third straight year Granholtz and the Republican-controlled Legislature have struggled to come to terms on spending, in large part because the anemic state economy has consistently produced less tax revenue than anticipated.

This year, Granholtz proposed to bolster revenue by tweaking tax laws (she called it closing loopholes; Republicans called it raising taxes) and increasing fees in various areas. But both the state House and Senate rejected those propos-

als, and Friday's agreement leaves them out.

That result pleased Mary Kilbride, co-owner of Triangle Vending, a Clinton Township company that owns and operates about 300 vending machines. Granholtz's proposal had called for more than \$25 million in new taxes on vending machine products.

Kilbride said Friday the taxes would have translated into "tens of thousands" of dollars in new costs for her company, resulting in higher prices for her customers and fewer benefits for Triangle's 14 employees.

"We're really appreciative the governor and Legislature solved the budget without including us," she said. "People

hear something like 'closing corporate loopholes' and they think you're talking about some giant corporation. But this is a second-generation family business, and it would hurt us bad."

In their statements Friday, Granholtz and her legislative counterparts avoided detailed discussion of some of the proposed spending cuts, however.

Sikkema said every area of state spending beyond education and aid to local governments was the target of cuts. He cited reductions in the Michigan Economic Development Corp. as justified on the grounds that with Michigan's unemployment rate leading the nation, "they haven't been per-

forming."

DeRoche called the spending cuts "responsible and required with Michigan in the economic condition that it's in."

The pain inflicted by proposed cuts was eased somewhat when officials recently raised their estimates of state tax revenue for 2006 slightly. The agreement also calls for about \$100 million in additional revenue from, among other things, a renewed crackdown on tax cheats and raids on leftover special purpose funds.

Contact DAWSON BELL at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.
Lansing Bureau Chief Chris Christoff contributed to this report.

MIRS

Friday, September 9, 2005

GOP's Welfare Program Relegated To 'Pilot'

The meat-axe strategy first proposed by House Republicans to lop off able-bodied recipients from the state welfare roles was quietly put to rest during budget negotiations with the Big Three.

In its place, Gov. Jennifer **Granholt**, Senate Majority Leader Ken **SIKKEMA** (R-Wyoming) and House Speaker Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Idaho) decided to bury the axe and take a more measured approach.

Acting much like former Democratic President Bill **Clinton**, who worked a bi-partisan welfare reform scheme with the GOP Congress when he was in office, the Governor signed off on a plan that orders the Department of Human Services (DHS) to do several things.

At the foundation of the compromise is a department review of the welfare ranks. Two separate groups will be determined: those who are disabled for one reason or another and unable to work and the so-called able-bodied adults who could work if they could find employment and have been receiving state aid for 48 months.

Under the original House GOP plan, that distinction was not made clear, but it is now and is designed to mute any criticism that “widows and orphans” are being tossed off the welfare roles.

After that head count is determined, four pilot programs will be launched in an attempt find work for those in group two. These are patterned after Project Zero, which was instituted during the Gov. John **Engler** administration. The welfare-to-work program started as a pilot program, but was quickly expanded to other parts of the state after a trial run in a handful of counties.

One source familiar with the new deal indicated there is no “drop dead” date written into the proposal at which point these recipients would stop getting state aid. That, of course, was the most controversial aspect of the House plan before it was negotiated away.

*(Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK** contributed to this report.)*

General Fund 2005-2006 Budget Targets - By The Numbers

Agriculture	\$28,362,700
Attorney General	\$31,501,200
Capitol Outlay	\$256,002,200
Civil Rights	\$12,108,700
Civil Service	\$7,102,400
Community Colleges	\$281,327,400
Community Health	\$2,951,899,400
Corrections	\$1,781,150,700
Education	\$16,450,400
Environmental Quality	\$31,809,600
Executive	\$5,375,500
Higher Education	\$1,576,938,100
History, Arts and Libraries	\$41,821,900
Human Services (Formerly FIA)	\$1,081,314,000
Information Technology	\$0
Judiciary	\$157,614,500
Labor and Economic Growth	\$70,381,600
Legislature	\$124,673,900
Management and Budget	\$35,217,900
Military Affairs	\$37,789,100
Natural Resources	\$25,593,800
School Aid	\$62,714,000
State	\$13,497,800
State Police	\$235,361,600

Transportation	\$0
Treasury (Debt Service)	\$52,886,900
Treasury (Operations)	\$57,684,500
Treasury (Revenue Sharing)	\$712,000
Total	\$8,977,291,800

September 9, 2005

UDOW URGES CAUTION ON FOOD STAMPS CUTS

Plans in Congress to cut the federal Food Stamp program is going to leave hungry people in Michigan and other states, said Human Services Director Marianne Udow at a press conference Friday to urge federal officials to rethink those proposed cuts.

Ms. Udow said nearly 10 percent of Michigan residents currently receive food stamps. She said the plan to require recipients to earn less than 130 percent of poverty, down from the current 200 percent, would end benefits to some 30,000 people.

The changes in eligibility are part of a proposal to cut \$3 billion from the U.S. Department of Agriculture budget. Discussions on those cuts have been put on hold for the next couple of weeks in light of the hurricane disaster in the Southeast.

"These are people we have to think about the vulnerability," she said of those who would lose benefits under the plan. Particularly with rising housing, energy and fuel costs, she said many of those in the group that would lose benefits could face lack of food. "We do not want to see that happen," she said.

The withdrawal of the food support would be compounded by a potential lack of assistance in other areas. Ms. Udow noted that fuel prices last winter dried up heating assistance funds this year in July, and she said the hurricane and other factors are expected to drive those prices up more steeply for the coming winter.

Jane Marshall, executive director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, said the food stamps assistance as it is now is not sufficient for many families. She noted that, at least in Ingham County, some half of the people seeking assistance at local food banks also receive food stamps. "That indicates there's more need," she said. "Any cuts to the food stamp program are going to dramatically hurt everybody."

Ms. Marshall said the cuts would also be a hit to the economy, noting that the funds pass through local grocery stores.

"Cuts to food stamps are just going to put more people at our doorstep," Ms. Marshall said. "We do have limits on the quantity and variety of food we can make available."

Ms. Udow also noted that the food banks are helping provide assistance for those who lost homes – and more – in Hurricane Katrina, putting further stress on those relief systems.

Food banks and other aid agencies have seen an influx of support in the week since Katrina struck, but Ms. Udow noted that the experience of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 shows those extra donations now could mean fewer resources later. "What's going on right now could in fact mean that we'll have fewer resources available later in the year," she said.

State, advocates fight possible cuts to food stamps

Published September 12, 2005

By Amy F. Bailey

Associated Press

Paula Crigger makes a little more than minimum wage at her full-time job as a shift manager at a Flint-area fast food restaurant, but she needs help to pay for groceries every month.

The 33-year-old mother of two young girls receives \$290 a month in food stamps to supplement her income. But she'd be among 26,000 Michigan residents - mostly the working poor - who would lose that assistance under a spending cut being considered by Congress.

And Crigger is worried.

"With the kids packing lunches every day, just the three meals a day for two kids alone, that is quite a bit a month," she said.

U.S. House and Senate agriculture committees are expected to decide in the coming weeks which of its programs will lose \$3 billion over five years. Food stamps are among those considered for a cut.

Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and several advocacy groups have vowed to fight the possible food stamp cut, in part by emphasizing the number of state residents who rely on the benefit to feed their families. With fewer people receiving food stamps, Udow and others are worried about the strain on food banks and other services already stretched to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

"We're pretty sure we're going to have less available in our state because we have to divert it to the South," Jane Marshall, director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, said during a Friday news conference at a Red Cross food distribution center in Lansing.

The food warehouse was packed Friday with pallets of canned food, juice and paper products. But the warehouse will have far fewer products in a few weeks because of demand from the Gulf Coast states damaged by the hurricane and others that have taken in evacuees, Marshall said.

The loss of food and other supplies at the Lansing distribution center comes as more people are using food stamps, running out and heading to local food banks and emergency food providers for their snacks and meals, Marshall said.

Michigan's program

The state's food stamp program by the numbers:

- \$237.40: the average amount in food stamps for a family of three for a month
- 602,857: the monthly average of food stamp recipients in 2000
- 943,713: the monthly average of food stamp recipients in the 2004 fiscal year
- 1.07 million: the average number of food stamp recipients in July
- 26,000: Michigan food stamp recipients receiving other income who would lose their food assistance under a spending cut proposed by the Bush administration and considered by Congress
- \$896 million: the amount the food stamp program pumped into the Michigan economy last year

Sources: The Michigan Department of Human Services and "Food Stamps: Supporting Healthy Families and Communities in Michigan" report by the Center of Civil Justice, Elder Law of Michigan, Food Bank Council of Michigan, Michigan Association of United Ways and the Michigan League for Human Services

The number of Michigan residents receiving food stamps went up from nearly 603,000 per month in 2000 to nearly 944,000 in the last fiscal year, a 56 percent increase, according to a report released Friday by a coalition of advocacy groups, including the Center for Civil Justice. May's caseload represents a 75 percent increase in the number of food stamps cases since 2000, the report said. A little more than 1 million people received food stamps in July, according to the most recent data from the Department of Human Services.

Michigan is one of 10 states allowed to use a federal option to offer food stamps to families who have incomes slightly higher than the poverty line. The state considers other expenses, such as housing and utility costs, when determining eligibility for food stamps.

The Bush administration has proposed eliminating that option to save money. The change would mean 26,000 Michigan residents who are working low-wage jobs or receiving Social Security benefits would lose their food stamps, according to the Department of Human Services.

Udow said a family of four that brings in \$36,000 a year is eligible for food stamps under the federal option, but no longer would qualify under the proposed reductions.

Spotlight: Capuchin Friar Rick Samyn

Detroit monk toils in soil to feed needy

Friar's garden project with food bank cultivates tons of vegetables and environmental awareness.

Sunday, September 11, 2005

By David Josar / The Detroit News

In the hot late-summer sun, Capuchin Friar Rick Samyn is stooped over a row of pepper plants on a plot of land on Detroit's east side.

He is pulling weed after weed and, unlike the five other volunteers working the organic garden on a recent Wednesday, Samyn doesn't wear gloves.

"I like to feel what I'm doing," explained the monk, a former engineer in the Navy and Coast Guard.

Samyn, 49, with his baseball cap and tattooed arms, has turned his love of the environment into a cottage industry in Detroit that provides food for the poor, reuses vacant lots and teaches young and old about gardening and agriculture.

His gospel is rooted in St. Francis of Assisi and the belief that people should give back to society and work with their neighbors.

Samyn's baby is Earth Works, a cooperative project of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Gleaners Community Food Bank, which began in 1999 and now, on less than one acre scattered over three locations, grows tons of food. Last year, Samyn and his volunteers grew 9,300 pounds of vegetables.

"Brother Rick is a real visionary," said Ruth Ellen Mayhall, Gleaners Food Bank's vice president of development. Gleaners donated the land for an Earth Works garden. "He has tenacity and is tireless -- I don't think he sleeps."

Samyn grew up on Detroit's east side, where his family ran Samyn's Market, a meat and grocery store.

"My father, I think, always wanted to be a farmer, but he never had the chance," he said.

Instead, Samyn's father took the family on outings to the farms of friends, where they baled hay, fed chickens and helped with the harvest. "This really got into my blood," he said.

But Samyn took a detour.

He was in the Navy for four years and later did nine years in the Coast Guard. During that time in the military, two things happened that redirected Samyn's life.

His wife had divorced him ("That was devastating"), and the mission of his career changed. More and more, Samyn said, he was doing drug interdiction runs around Puerto Rico, Colombia and El Salvador. Using rudimentary Spanish, he spoke with the people who operated the boats running illegal drugs.

"These guys weren't the guys getting rich," said Samyn, as he paused to determine whether the pepper on the plant should be left or harvested. "They were just doing this to survive."

The tipping point for Samyn came when he helped detain several drug runners off Puerto Rico. Talking with a mix of Spanish and English, Samyn learned they were excited to go to the United States, even as prisoners. "They would rather live here in prison than back in their home country," he said. "That wasn't right."

While in Puerto Rico, he talked to some Capuchin monks and then returned to Detroit. He joined the order in 1988.

Samyn's workday attire is a T-shirt and well-worn jeans. He tools around from garden to garden in a white pickup. He uses the truck to tote the peppers, tomatoes, beans and other vegetables to markets.

The Earth Works Garden supplies produce to four WIC/Project Fresh sites in Wayne County where the vegetables are given to participants in WIC, the federal nutrition program for women and children. The produce also is sold at mini-markets and distributed to food banks and soup kitchens. Other vegetables are canned for sale.

And through the gardens, Samyn and other volunteers teach children about the environment and the importance of not just using the earth, but giving back.

"We all need to get along -- with ourselves and nature," he said.

You can reach David Josar at (313) 222-2073 or djosar@detnews.com.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Michigan welcomes Louisiana residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina – Relocation to Michigan communities begins today

September 9, 2005

LANSING – Eight families and 11 individuals evacuated from Louisiana will arrive in Lansing and Grand Rapids today in the first wave of resettlements in Michigan in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Of the 289 evacuees that initially arrived at Fort Custer on the Battle Creek Air National Guard Base Monday, September 5, approximately 70 have already left to join relatives in other parts of the country or resettle elsewhere. The remaining families and individual evacuees will be resettled as quickly as possible, with priority given to families with children so that children may enroll in school.

“We are delighted with the response from communities around the state who have identified available housing and offered to welcome evacuees into their communities,” DHS director Marianne Udow said today. “Grand Rapids and Lansing will receive the first few families who have been staying at Fort Custer today, and more communities will be contacted and involved later today or over the weekend.”

Local mayors and DHS directors worked with local human services and relief agencies to identify no-cost or low-cost housing that could afford families and individuals with privacy and autonomy for their stay in Michigan, expected to last from three to nine months. Evacuees will not be placed in shelters or shared private homes. DHS is working to find homes and provide support for evacuees who have traveled to and settled in Michigan on their own as well. Evacuees who are living with relatives or friends in Michigan who need support services should contact their local Department of Human Services office.

“Our priority is on minimizing disruption to these families and individuals by placing them where they can have immediate access to the kinds of services they need – medical, transportation, or schools,” said Udow, “We are also matching each family and individual with a “mentor” family who can help them adjust to the community and get established in schools, with jobs, and with other supports.”

Governor Granholm has pledged to accept up to 10,000 evacuees, but the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is still working with other states to determine the most appropriate evacuee allocation. Michigan is on standby, waiting for news from FEMA about the anticipated arrival of additional evacuees. FEMA has indicated that evacuees may be arriving in Battle Creek this evening.

“Everyone’s first priority,” said Governor Granholm, “is ensuring that these families are finding refuge and settling in the place that’s best for them. If that happens to be a Michigan community, we want these new neighbors know that we’re ready to provide the support they need to get their lives started again. We’re ready to be a refuge for as long as people need us.”

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

Choices cost us

The suffering of Hurricane Katrina's victims is nothing more or less than the outcome of political choices Americans have been voting for. Tax cuts, instead of infrastructure investments, foreign invasions instead of meaningful security, consumption instead of conservation.

We elected an aloof, secretive administration, totally ignorant of the lives of the nation's poor, that has done more to model political complacency than engage us in long-term nation building at home.

The message: Take a vacation! Buy a car! Want some political debate? Hey, let's talk about intelligent design! Unbelievable.

Betsy Ann Smith
East Lansing

9-11 155

Shame on Bush

Am I the only one who finds it more than a coincidence that the relief did not arrive in the hurricane-hit areas until President Bush did as well? Isn't this taking his knight-on-horseback complex to an extreme?

Shame, Mr. President! Shame on where you have taken this nation. Shame on ignoring the pleas of the New Orleans leaders who have been lobbying for aid to better prepare their levees years before this disaster. Shame on letting so much time pass while our citizens suffered before proper response is sent. Shame on being deaf to cries of the poor while you listen intently to the demands of the wealthy.

This situation underlines just how precarious we all are when our leaders lack concern for the powerless and poor.

Emily Haggerty
East Lansing

9-11

Is lesson learned?

Coulda — had more insight and raised the levees. Spent more money on infrastructure if it wasn't for all the wars we have fought over the years.

Woulda — gotten a better head of Federal Emergency Management Agency to begin with, if our president had half a brain. Helped the poor and helpless out of that area of New Orleans if we had our act together.

Shoulda — listened to the scientists more and our pocket-books less. Make note of all the suffering and make a promise that this will not happen again.

Coulda, woulda, shoulda — a country's lament. Let's hope we do better with the next disaster.

Paul R. Pirrotta
Holt

9-11

KATRINA AFTERMATH: Metro houses of worship give help and hope to evacuees

Disaster unites many across faiths

September 12, 2005

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI and M.L. ELRICK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

In a saltbox-sized church on Detroit's west side Sunday, the matriarch of a four-generation New Orleans family stood front and center.

Even though she was forced from her Louisiana home by Hurricane Katrina, Joyce Wells is rooted in Detroit now by faith and family -- 16 other kin praying in the pews behind her.

"I want you to turn around," the Rev. James Tharrington, the guest preacher at New Gospel Temple Church of God in Christ, said as he spun in place. "Because God's going to turn it around. ...You went through hell and high water, and you're still standing."

Among the most unlikely -- and perhaps most pleasant -- outcomes of the disaster is how it has brought together dozens of folks from the gulf coast with those of various faiths across metro Detroit for weekend services and supper.

At Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, about two dozen New Orleans evacuees, none of them Jewish, found respite and goodwill at a Sabbath service.

About 50 hurricane survivors were guests Sunday of Great Faith Ministries in Detroit, a church that ferried them out of a shelter in Baton Rouge, La., earlier last week to a Comfort Inn in Detroit. As he had preached to them in Louisiana, Bishop Wayne T. Jackson told them again in his sprawling Detroit sanctuary: "We are not going to let you down."

At the Ramada Inn in Southfield on Sunday, Beacon Light Full Gospel Ministries served up breakfast and gift bags with school supplies and Bibles to evacuees now living at the hotel. And on Sunday evening, a Catholic priest celebrated mass.

Prayer provided hope, evacuees said over and over again.

Tharrington's words left Wells, 67, a Louisiana State University custodian, feeling restful and serene. The service "felt real good," she said as her family ate chicken, greens and candied yams with the small congregation afterward.

"The word of God was a blessing," said Anthony Wells, 45, Joyce's son.

Back home, he worked as an assistant director in the Louisiana State University medical school office that handles autopsies. Here, he acts as a kind of project manager and tour director for the clan -- called to the Detroit area by another of Joyce's sons, Merlin Wells, an auto industry engineer. The clan is now living in the Ramada Inn.

A smile rarely left his face Sunday. He collected money from his family members for the offering plate. And he has accepted invitations to visit other congregations in the coming weeks. In his hometown, he imagines hard work and prayer will "work a miracle."

"My city will reappear clean," he predicted confidently. "I see it. We're taking out some of the wicked, and we'll start anew."

Tharrington predicted sunny days for the Wells family.

To 12-year-old Justin Wells, Joyce's grandson, he said, "Could it be that God, with all you been through, could raise you to be a doctor or a scientist?"

To 27-year-old Sam Wells, an assistant store manager, Tharrington prophesied a future as a consultant on how to handle catastrophe.

As evacuees headed out of the Ramada Inn to Sunday services, Jody Lipton and Geoff Kretchmer of Huntington Woods tried to provide some gently worn dress clothes to help them look their Sunday best in weeks to come.

"Everybody thinks about the kids, but this way, the men who need jobs..." Jody Lipton said as her voice trailed off and she rifled through about 20 cleaned and pressed business shirts, along with suit jackets, pants, ties and belts culled from her husband's closet. "If they let me, I'll go through my neighbor's closets, too."

But as houses of worship welcomed hurricane evacuees, it was clearly a case of come as you are. Michael Robinson stood out Friday night at Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield. And it wasn't just because he was wearing a black New York Yankees cap with a stiff, straight brim instead of a yarmulke.

It wasn't just because of his baseball jersey, which had "I M A FOOL" printed across his back. And it wasn't just because he was one of the few black faces among more than 200 people attending Kabbalat Shabbat services.

Robinson elicited smiles and nods as the personification of hundreds of thousands of people who lost everything in Katrina's aftermath.

"It was good. I needed this. I really needed this," Robinson said while having a smoke outside the synagogue. "I needed to be prayed on for a minute."

Robinson, 21, said he and 15 relatives crammed into a van about 10 days ago after the flood. He said he left behind a \$650-a-week job as a garbage man and saw things he never could have imagined before -- bodies, dogs, rats and snakes floating in his hometown.

Keithory Paige, 16, who was hanging out with Robinson, said the service reminded him of church, only with different languages. Some of the service was in Hebrew, much of it involved singing and there was even an opportunity for congregants to form a line and dance.

"I like those songs y'all singing," Paige told Robin Schwartz afterward, smiling. "I wanted to get up and do the little dance, but I was scared."

A moment later, he added: "They got a lot of nice people in the world."

Jennifer Finkel, 11, of West Bloomfield helped wrap presents for the 37 bags of toys the synagogue gave to evacuees.

"I felt honored to be here," she said.

Contact PATRICIA MONTEMURRI at 313-223-4538 or montemurri@freepress.com. Staff writer Shawn Windsor contributed to this report.

Energy waves

Grand Rapids Press

Sunday, September 11, 2005

The energy implications of Hurricane Katrina aren't on the same scale as the human havoc, but they are serious nonetheless and aren't limited to gas lines and prices above three bucks a gallon. Katrina likely will fuel energy issues over many months in the form of oil and natural gas shortages and higher energy prices -- pushed up by damages to drilling platforms, pipelines and refineries. The consequent shock to the nation's economy will continue to roll through the budgets of individual households and employers.

Part of the recovery should include rethinking the Gulf Coast's concentration of production facilities. As recent reports in the Wall Street Journal note, up to 35 percent of U.S. domestic oil production and most off-shore oil drilling occur in the Gulf of Mexico. Were it not for President Bush's tapping of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, according to industry researcher Daniel Yergin, the post-Katrina per-barrel price of oil might have exceeded \$80.

The easy answer is to develop alternative energy sources and compel consumers to turn to them. The just-passed energy bill spends more than twice as much on renewable sources and conservation than on oil and gas production. The nation should go farther in the direction of renewable energy, but there is no getting around the need for oil and gas for many years. Stability for the industry and the economy, therefore, demands a dispersing of refineries and offshore production. The excessive dependence on refineries concentrated at New Orleans is partly because no new refinery has been built in the United States since 1976. Congress needs to find ways to permit new refineries to be constructed.

At the same time, Congress must look at what the digging of ship channels through Mississippi River marshes has done to the effectiveness of wetlands in cushioning blows from Gulf storms. Katrina was unprecedented, but the catastrophe was worsened by damage done over many years to coastal wetlands.

The United States may or may not ever again see a disaster on the scale of Katrina, but it definitely will see more hurricanes in the Gulf. Just as the people of the region will have to be better protected, so will the nation's energy stability. Putting it on a wider geographic base should be a part of that.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 9, 2005

Granholt Encourages Michigan to Observe National Day of Prayer

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today encouraged Michigan citizens and religious organizations to observe the National Day of Prayer on Friday, September 16, to honor the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The President declared the National Day of Prayer in a proclamation yesterday.

“For more than a week, we in Michigan have joined together to open our hearts, our wallets, and our communities to support our brothers and sisters in the Gulf region,” Granholm said. “Next Friday, we will offer prayers for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and for the thousands of relief workers who are coming to their aid.”

Michigan has been a leader in the nation’s relief effort, offering to provide temporary or transitional housing for up to 10,000 evacuees from the Gulf states. Granholm partnered with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters to sponsor a statewide Michigan Cares, Michigan Gives fundraiser on radio and television stations for the American Red Cross. Granholm also established the Michigan Hurricane Helpline to coordinate the influx of donations from across the state.

#

Child alone on bus briefly

Monday, September 12, 2005

By Rick Wilson

The Grand Rapids Press

The 4-year-old girl left behind on a bus Friday was alone for only about five to 10 minutes, according to the Kent Intermediate School District.

"The driver should have known better and should have checked," Assistant Superintendent Ron Koehler said. "She was the only child left on the bus and was in a car seat so she couldn't get off by herself."

Koehler said the child's grandmother, who is the girl's caregiver, was disappointed the child was left unattended but satisfied that the child was unharmed.

The district will not release the family's name, Koehler said.

Kellie Dean, owner of Lansing-based Dean Transportation, which manages the special education bus runs, said the driver was fired Friday after the incident was discovered.

Koehler said the driver did not realize the child was there when he drove home and made a phone call.

"When he got back on the bus, he realized what he had done and went back to the school," he said.

The child was reported missing by her school, Meadowlawn Early Childhood Development Center in Kentwood.

Koehler said the driver worked for the district about 18 months.

Michigan will allow past allegations in sex offense cases

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer
Sep 11, 8:50 AM EDT

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- It is a staple of criminal law that a defendant's past behavior is generally off limits during trial.

The reasoning is that jurors should not convict someone for being a "bad guy" but instead base their decision on evidence in the case before them.

But an exception would be made in cases involving alleged sexual crimes against children under legislation that has unanimously passed the Legislature and that Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said she will sign.

Supporters say sex offenders have a compulsion to rape or molest again, citing recent high-profile abductions and killings of children in Florida and Idaho.

Prosecutors say the measure would help jurors receive all the relevant information - including a defendant's background and character - to ensure that guilty people are convicted.

"Especially when it comes to sex offenses, history is a big predictor of the future," said Sen. Alan Cropsey, a DeWitt Republican and lawyer who is sponsoring the proposed rule change.

But opponents, mainly defense lawyers, think the change will lead to horrible results.

"You're basically going to convict everybody charged, or darn close to that," said F. Martin Tieber, past president of the Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan. "There are a lot of false allegations in criminal sexual conduct cases."

The bill, also sponsored by Republican Rep. David Law of West Bloomfield, is part of a multi-bill package aimed at preventing sex offenders from getting near children in schools and day care centers. It would amend Michigan's court rules in cases where defendants are accused of sex crimes against youths under age 18. Prosecutors could introduce testimony that a defendant had committed another sex offense against a minor - including offenses for which the defendant was neither charged nor convicted.

The new rule resembles federal court rules, enacted 10 years ago, that allow prior conduct to be admitted in child molestation and sexual assault trials. Backers routinely cite the federal policy as a reason for making the change.

But practically speaking, sex crimes are rarely prosecuted at the federal level, leading detractors to argue that a rule change will be quite drastic in Michigan. At least one other state, California, has a similar rule.

"You're adding more people to our prison system who probably didn't commit the particular crime they're charged with even though they may have done bad things in the past," Tieber said.

By allowing past behavior to be used as character evidence there is a classic danger of unfairness, he said. Past behavior already can be used in limited circumstances to show motive or intent, but that's not the same as character evidence, he said.

Tieber noted that jurors think the defendant is probably guilty if he has a propensity to act criminally. The question should be, "Did the defendant molest his accuser?" But it becomes, "Is the defendant a child molester?"

Add in the reality that many people are naturally repelled by charges of sexual conduct against vulnerable children, and the defendant is in trouble, Tieber said.

But prosecutors point to California as proof that jurors can be fair. There, a jury heard past allegations that pop star Michael Jackson molested or had designs on five other boys. They found him not guilty in the case before them.

"Juries will put the evidence in the context that is deserved," Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said. "As a rule, I have confidence in the intelligence and wisdom of the jury."

Morse, who pushed for the rule change on behalf of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, noted that just because evidence can be introduced doesn't mean a judge will allow it. He also said prosecutors are at a disadvantage in sex-related cases involving minors because children's memories are not as developed as adults, and they can be reluctant to testify, especially against family members.

"For a full examination of the truth, you ought to be able to take in the context of a person's past behavior to explain current behavior," Morse said. "Among the most egregious crimes are sex offenses against children."

David Eggert can be reached at [deggert\(at\)ap.org](mailto:deggert(at)ap.org)

Published September 10, 2005

Zwick faces 2nd contempt charge

Ex-Eaton County guardian accused of failing duties

By Tracy Burton

Lansing State Journal

CHARLOTTE - A second contempt of court charge has been filed against a former Eaton County court guardian accused of exploiting two women he was supposed to protect. The families of the two Lansing sisters say attorney Charles M. Zwick mishandled more than \$630,000 belonging to the women.

Wilma Southwell died at the age of 92, and Alice Grahn, who is 84, has Alzheimer's disease. "The contempt charge is based upon the alleged failure on the part of Mr. Zwick to perform his duties of trust as assigned by the court," Frank Reynolds, a special prosecutor assigned to the case, said Friday.

Zwick is in Eaton County Jail on a \$300,000 bond.

He can't be reached because the jail does not take messages for inmates, and he has not responded to a letter seeking comment.

His attorney, John Deming, declined to comment.

Both contempt charges were filed in probate court; an investigation into possible criminal charges is ongoing.

The first charge of contempt of court, which alleges breach of fiduciary duty, was brought against Zwick last month in the handling of Southwell's estate. That matter has been set for trial on Nov. 8.

The charge filed Thursday, an identical charge to the first one, involves Grahn's estate. It is not clear whether both charges will be folded into the November trial. He faces up to 30 days in jail and a \$250 fine.

A judge has ordered Zwick to repay the money.

He's now the target of a criminal probe by Eaton County authorities and the FBI. No criminal charges have been issued, Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Michael Eagen said Friday.

The sisters' relatives are holding up as well as can be expected, said their attorney, Philip Vilella.

"We haven't been repaid yet," Vilella said Friday.

"The frustrations have been trying to figure out what might have happened and where it went.

"Where is the money?"

Contact Tracy Burton at 377-1206 or tburton@lsj.com.

Drifter is charged in stabbings

September 12, 2005

BY AMBER HUNT MARTIN

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

He had been convicted of robbing and beating her and her husband, but Dorothy Smith couldn't turn her back on the drifter from Detroit.

Robert Jackson, 47, was arrested Saturday night on charges of beating and fatally stabbing Smith and stabbing her husband, Lloyd, who remains in critical condition at an undisclosed hospital, according to police.

The couple was found in their living room Thursday. Chuck Nebus, Farmington Public Safety director, said police believe the couple had been attacked the previous night.

Jackson had spent five years in prison for beating and robbing the couple in 1998. After his release, he turned to the Smiths again for help, sometimes staying in their Farmington home and doing odd jobs around the house.

"They believed in him and they gave him a second chance," Nebus said. "And he took advantage of it."

The Smiths' family members -- including their three children -- were concerned about the rekindled friendship, Nebus said. But the Smiths had a soft spot for homeless people.

"They were Good Samaritans," Nebus said.

After the Smiths were discovered by a friend stopping by, police immediately focused on Jackson. Nebus said he had recently been seen at their house.

Jackson confessed to stabbing the couple after Detroit police arrested him at Gratiot and St. Aubin.

He was arraigned Sunday on charges of first-degree murder and attempted murder and jailed without bond.

Contact AMBER HUNT MARTIN at 313-222-2708.

Center offers evening child care

Sunday, September 11, 2005

By Myron Kukla
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Shift workers will have a night-time child-care option starting this month. Appletree Christian Learning Center, 10240 Adams St., announced it was ready to accommodate up to 50 children in a new extended-hour program that will keep the facility open until 11:30 p.m.

"With the economy the way it is locally, many parents are taking whatever kind of work schedules they can get, which puts them in a bind if they do not have any relatives to help them with child care," said owner Stacy Taylor, who operates three centers in southern Ottawa County.

The Adams Street center also will be open Saturdays and Sundays. It will open at 5:30 a.m. every day.

Taylor said the Adams Street site is a good starting place for the extended hours because it is near several factories.

The center has about 110 children during the day.

"We already have some children signed up for evening care, but there is still room for more," Taylor said.

"If we find there is a need to add third-shift child care, we can do that also. We want to see how this works first."

She said night hours also might be offered at her other centers, in Holland Township and Allendale, if the demand is there.

Those centers are open 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

"This will give parents, especially working single parents, a comfort zone to know extended child care is there when they need it," Taylor said.

Kerry Dewey said the expanded hours were a good thing for working families.

"I'm glad to see someone is giving people an option for shift work," said Dewey, an employee at Uniform Color in Holland whose 4-year-old daughter, Delaney, goes to the center.

"Our company is going to a rotating work schedule, and it will be a benefit for the employees who will be working different hours."

Another idea Taylor is implementing is "date night" child care for parents who need to a break from home.

"It's tough for parents to get out sometimes, whether it is to go to a movie or do shopping. Having a place to bring their children for a few hours if they don't have relatives here will be a big service to them," she said.

Appletree will accept drop-in children, but they are required by state law to be registered with the center in advance.

"Once they are registered, they can just call us and let us know when their children will be coming in," Taylor said.

Appletree centers, which accepts infants through 12-year-olds, offers full-day programs and before- and after-school programs.

The 10,000-square-foot centers each have eight classrooms and 25 full- and part-time staff.

An additional four to five staff will be added at the Adams Street site.

The fee is \$4 an hour per child, although costs decrease the more parents use the center.

To register, call 748-9932.

Kalamazoo Gazette

Letters

September 12, 2005

Fix child custody for servicemen

Please take note of the latest events in our state where fathers who serve their country and working fathers lose custody rights for the same reason. When a national guardsman or reservist father is activated and the woman becomes the day-to-day caretaker of the child of a divorce, the father can and has had his custody reduced or revoked.

This is the same reason that 80 percent of fathers face reduced custody when child custody is disputed in our family courts. What is going to happen to the security of our country when fathers learn that National Guard and Reserve duty may result in child custody reduction?

Do something about this and give all fathers presumed-equal child custody rights unless convicted of a violent crime -- or we may have an even larger shortage of willing fathers joining the guard and reserves.

Darrick Scott-Farnsworth

Augusta

Governor Granholm Calls for Extradition of Wisconsin Man for Unpaid Child Support

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced that she has initiated proceedings to extradite a Wisconsin man charged with failing to pay more than \$15,000 in child support, a felony crime punishable by four years in prison.

David Russell Bednarz of Green Bay, Wisconsin, was arrested by law enforcement officers in Brown County, Wisconsin. In May 1995, Mr. Bednarz was ordered by the Dickinson County Circuit Court in Michigan to pay \$75 per week for the support of his minor children, but has failed to comply. As of January 2005, his unpaid child support obligations totaled more than \$15,000.

“Mr. Bednarz has failed to meet his responsibility to support his children, and that has consequences,” Granholm said. “These extradition proceedings are the result of the diligent work of the Dickinson County Friend of the Court and the office of Dickinson County Prosecutor Christopher Ninomiya. Michigan has a great team committed to making sure those who are required to pay child support, and those who can pay, do so.”

Upon return to Michigan, Mr. Bednarz will face prosecution. In Michigan, non-support of a child is a felony punishable by up to four years in prison and/or a \$2,000 fine. Since taking office, Governor Granholm has requested the return, through the extradition process, of more than 100 parents who have failed to support their children as ordered by courts in Michigan.

Under the Uniform Criminal Extradition Act, the power to demand extradition of a fugitive who has fled from justice in Michigan and taken refuge in another state is vested in the governor. After receiving extradition documents, Wisconsin officials can issue a warrant delivering the fugitive into the custody of Michigan authorities.

To encourage parents to pay their past due child support, the state is offering an amnesty period beginning October 1, 2005. Under the new law, parents who owe past due child support in Michigan will have a 90-day window to avoid state criminal and civil enforcement penalties. Penalties that have already been initiated will be waived with the exception of felony prosecutions or in circumstances where a delinquent parent has already been arrested due to failure or refusal to pay past due child support.

The amnesty program does not affect current support obligations. The amnesty program was established by Public Act 584 of 2004 and sponsored by Rep. Alexander Lipsey.

For more information regarding the amnesty program, parents can contact their local Friend of the Court office, call 1-866-540-0008, or visit www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on “Child Support.”

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Monday, September 12, 2005

Teachers say they 'give up' on disadvantaged students Survey shows need for better training and services

The Detroit News

Michigan teachers are so frustrated when dealing with their most challenging pupils that many say they simply give up on disadvantaged students.

The startling finding -- turned up in a statewide survey -- shows the problem is more a matter of class and income than race and ethnicity.

The data is a heads-up for schools of education, local school boards and administrators, as well as for parents and taxpayers.

The system is not working. The problems run deep and it's not all the fault of teachers. Every day, teachers face classrooms filled with society's problems, including differences in family incomes, religion, race and parent's educational background.

Yet teachers are expected to bring all students up to speed at the same rate, lest they violate the recent No Child Left Behind rules.

In some cases, it can't be done, say teachers in the survey by EPIC-MRA of Lansing. So they give up on certain students and concentrate their efforts where they will have the most likelihood of success.

About 82 percent of teachers say that happens at least a little.

And 50 percent say the giving up occurs "some" or "a lot." Even if half the teachers are off base in their assessment, it's a major problem.

Education is the first rung on the ladder to economic success. If the children of the poor are denied the chance to get on the ladder, they are doomed to a lifetime of disadvantage.

Even in rich districts, there is a percentage of students who aren't successful. The survey was designed to get teachers' opinions on the issue, says pollster Ed Sarpolus.

The Michigan Education Association and other groups have long worked on classroom-related cultural issues, realizing that education can't be effective until other matters are also addressed. Sometimes a barrier to learning can be something a teacher doesn't expect, such as how a poor student perceives the manner or the clothes of a middle-class teacher, experts say.

The MEA has for years offered sessions and professional development on reaching into poor communities, says Margaret Trimer-Hartley, MEA spokeswoman.

Those kinds of efforts need the wider and fuller support of lawmakers and the rest of the education community.

For example, college students studying to be teachers would welcome more training on dealing with diversity, which is often synonymous with race. But the survey says the bigger problems in the classroom are more directly related to economic class (family income), the education background of parents, as well as language barriers.

Interestingly, the poll suggests all the problems won't be solved with higher school budgets. If teachers are right, many problems lie outside the classroom.

Teachers need better training before they are assigned to a classroom, and more support once they get there in dealing with poor children. Schools must also be prepared to provide additional services to help students from homes where education is not a priority.

And they must work with poor parents to engage them in the learning process. The findings are from the teachers' point of view, which arguably may not be the whole picture. But on the other hand, teachers are at the heart of the system. And policy makers should study their analysis with an eye toward fixes.

Detroit's rank as nation's poorest city is problem entire state must tackle

Grand Rapids Press

Saturday, September 10, 2005

Detroit has replaced Cleveland as the nation's poorest big city. It's a title that all of Michigan should be eager to help its largest city shed. The poorest tag affects the entire state, not just Detroit.

Like it or not, the Motor City is the face of Michigan to the outside world. If it is perceived as mired in poverty, then touting this state as a desirable place to live, work, conduct business -- or even visit -- is that much harder for state leaders trying to turn around a stagnate state economy. Detroit's new status came in a U.S. Census report on cities with populations over 250,000. The data showed more than a third of Detroit residents (33.6 percent) live in poverty. That's defined as living below the federal poverty level of \$19,157 for a family of four. Rounding out the top five were El Paso, Texas; Miami; Newark, N.J.; Atlanta and Long Beach, Calif.. None of those other cities' poverty rates topped 29 percent.

Cleveland, last year's poorest city, fell to No. 12. The number of impoverished residents there dropped from 31.3 percent to 23.2 percent. Some of Cleveland's change is attributed to poor people leaving the city but not all of it. Going lower on the poverty chart means a dramatic climb on the one leading to a population that is prosperous. Cleveland has been aggressive in trying to lose the most impoverished crown. Detroit must be as well.

Soon after last year's rankings were released, Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell called a poverty summit with political and community leaders. She followed it up with public meetings to map out strategies to attack the problem. The cash-strapped city didn't come up with new programs but vowed to make better use of existing ones that provide educational opportunities, job training and placement and help with starting small businesses. Neighborhood revitalization and renovating or building affordable homes were also made high priorities. Improving the quality of life for poor residents and enticing the middle class to stay in the city has been the goal.

Detroit doesn't have to reinvent the wheel to make progress on the poverty front. Cleveland can be used as a guide. That isn't to minimize the problems. Indeed, the depth and scope of Detroit's problems are daunting, whether viewed

from the city's perspective or that of the state government and other cities. Detroit currently is in the midst of a mayoral campaign, one whose outcome could set a new direction for the city.

Regardless of the winner, the state and communities around Michigan need to be ready to join new efforts to restore and revive. Education opportunities, in particular, must be improved dramatically if people are to be expected to stay in the city or move there. The goal is not specifically to save the school system, which may be beyond saving, but to give each child in that city an opportunity to learn -- perhaps under the charter school initiative proposed by philanthropist Robert Thompson.

The rest of Michigan owes a lot to Detroit. In its auto industry heyday, Detroit was the economic engine of Michigan, contributing heavily to the rich array of public institutions and services the state has today.

Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick says the city is trying to lure diverse industries to the city to provide new jobs for unemployed residents. The jobless rate in Detroit has hovered around 15 percent for much of the year, compared to about 7 percent for the state.

It is imperative to break the generational pull of poverty in Detroit. Nearly half of the children under age 18 in the city are impoverished, according to the Census survey. That could be a harbinger of things to come if the poverty cycle isn't broken.

The whole state has a stake in making Detroit's reign as the nation's poorest big city a short one. The well-being of the city's 900,000-plus people is reason enough to care. Nearly one out of every 10 Michiganders lives in Detroit. But the reasons don't end there. We all have a lot invested in the city: the Detroit Institute of Art, the Museum of African American History, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Motown, Wayne State University, Ford Field, Comerica Park, the Joe, not to mention allegiances to the Tigers, Lions, Red Wings and Pistons.

When the world looks at Michigan, it sees Detroit first. The image shouldn't be one of an impoverished, crumbling concrete reminder of the auto industry's prosperous past.